



LEWIS & CLARK CITY-COUNTY Health Department

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For immediate release

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County Air-Quality Regulations Get Final Approval, Take Effect

The Montana Board of Environmental Review has unanimously approved adoption of new outdoor air-quality regulations aimed at protecting the health of Lewis and Clark County residents. The new rules took effect Sept. 23.

Last summer, the Lewis and Clark City-County Health Department and the local Board of Health recommended revising the existing rules to ensure that the county complies with more stringent air-pollution standards adopted in 2006 by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The county is required by law to have air-quality regulations that are at least as stringent as federal and state standards.

The new rules will affect anyone who lives or works in the Lewis and Clark County Air Pollution Control District and who operates solid-fuel-burning devices like wood stoves, outdoor wood-fired boilers, and incinerators. Anyone who idles diesel engines also may be affected.

The pollution control district encompasses Helena and its environs. A map of the district boundaries is available on the health department Web site at www.lewisandclarkhealth.org. Click on Environmental Health, Air Quality Regulations.

Under the new regulations, the county will designate air quality as “poor” when the amount of fine particulate matter in the air averages 35 micrograms per cubic meter over an 8-hour period. Previous rules set the amount at 65 micrograms over a 24-hour period. Fine particulate matter is sooty pollution that can be caused by vehicle exhaust and burning solid fuels.

When air quality is poor, residents may only use stoves that emit less than 7.5 grams per hour of fine particulate matter. In 2010, there were nine poor air-quality days during the winter heating months.

The EPA maintains a list of residential stoves that meet the new fine particulate requirement. The list is available on the health department Web site. Pellet stoves and masonry stoves also meet the new requirement.

Anyone whose primary heating source is temporarily not working, as well as anyone who meets certain low-income guidelines, may apply for an exemption to the rules. Variances may be requested for situations that would create a hardship.

The new rules prohibit coal burning at all times and increase fines for violation of the county air-quality regulations.

The health department maintains a 24-hour air-quality hotline. People may call 447-1644 to learn about current air-quality conditions. From Nov. 1 to March 1, the department also issues a daily air-quality update to local news outlets. Individuals can sign up to get a daily air-quality update by email by sending a request to outdooraq@co.lewis-clark.mt.us.

For more information, contact the Environmental Services Division of the health department at 447-8351.